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THE ROAD TO SUCCESS IN MILITARY OPERATIONS OTHER THAN WAR: PAVED
BY THE SYNCHRONIZATION OF CONVENTIONAL AND SPECIAL OPERATIONS
FORCES

by

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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Abstract

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The JFC has several doctrinal keys to successfully employ operational art in a MOOTW environment. Most important are the strategic estimate and the facets of operational art especially synergy, simultaneity and centers of gravity. Of the six MOOTW principles, the most important to the JFC are unity of effort, restraint, perseverance, and legitimacy. The JFC by constant awareness of the MOOTW principles and applying the facets of operational art most important to MOOTW will best synchronize his forces. This will ensure that the JFC really understands what the mission is and tailors the force to achieve the military and political objectives in the shortest time with the fewest casualties.

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THE ROAD TO SUCCESS IN MILITARY OPERATIONS OTHER THAN WAR:

**Paved by the Synchronization of Conventional
and Special Operations Forces**

“While the unity of command is a time-honored military principle and a specific tenant of American doctrine, combining the efforts of separate services and conventional with unconventional forces has proved to be a difficult chore. For a range of reasons, from the petty bureaucratic to valid concerns of institutional integrity, the integration of special operations with conventional forces has been especially hard--there is an endemic lack of trust between the two communities.”¹

Introduction

Today's global security environment of uncertainty and chaos due to ethnic strife and declining global resources will require greater emphasis for U.S. military forces at the other than war end of the conflict scale when dealing with the full range of military operations. This is reflected in the National Security Strategy which states that “[t]he U.S. military conducts smaller-scale contingency operations to vindicate national interests and....[t]hese operations will likely pose the most frequent challenge for U.S. forces and cumulatively require significant commitments over time.”² With the current U.S. dominance in conventional military power, any potential future adversary will likely look for an unconventional or asymmetric means of engaging us “...to avoid direct military confrontation with the United States.”³

The operating environment for Military Operations Other Than War (MOOTW) also has to be understood. While discussing MOOTW it is important to remember that political

¹ Thomas Donnelly and others, Operation Just Cause: The Storming of Panama (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 59.

² The White House, A National Security Strategy for a New Century (Washington, D.C.: May 1997), 12.

³ Peter J. Shoomaker, “U.S. Special Operations Forces Prepare for Undefined Future,” National Defense, February 1998, 20.

objectives are the driving force, perhaps more so than operations in war. "MOOTW focus on deterring war and promoting peace while war encompasses large-scale sustained combat operations to achieve national objectives or to promote national interests. MOOTW are more sensitive to political considerations and often the military may not be the primary player..."⁴, although the military will control the escalation of force, a critical factor in MOOTW.

Military forces are most likely supporting the diplomatic and economic measures necessary to achieve the political ends in MOOTW. However, the actions of military forces usually have the highest visibility and therefore the greatest impact on the U.S. center of gravity--the will of the American people that affects any long term commitment to MOOTW.

The types of MOOTW that are possible vary from Peace Enforcement to Support of Disaster Relief and run the full spectrum of intensity from observer to possible combat. MOOTW can be divided into two broad categories, "...[t]hose that involve the use or threat of force and those that do not."⁵ The mixture of conventional and Special Operations Forces (SOF) for each type is mission dependent. When The joint force commander (JFC)⁶ first begins planning, he must understand how his military means are going to achieve his operational objectives. In order to accomplish this demanding task, he has to fully understand how best to integrate the full range of military options available and how to synchronize his conventional and SOF for mission accomplishment without escalation and with the flexibility to accommodate changes in mission.

⁴ Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Doctrine for Military Operations Other Than War (Joint Pub 3-07) (Washington, D.C.: 16 June 1995), vii.

⁵ John Waghelstein, "MOOTW," Lecture, U.S. Naval War College, Newport, RI: 5 May 1998.

⁶ Joint force commander (JFC) term is used to identify the operational commander, either the geographic CINC or JTF commander. See joint Pub 3-0, GL-7 for complete definition.

The synchronization⁷ of conventional and SOF, although crucial to the success of any military operation discussed in joint doctrine, is the most critical aspect of MOOTW. As recently as Operation UPHOLD DEMOCRACY in Haiti, there were indications that the relationship still had some problems. A Special Forces officer who participated in the operation and conducted after action reviews (AARs) found a disturbing trend. "The AARs indicated that the operation was a complete success. However, interviews I conducted on the interaction and integration of conventional and SOF in Haiti produced a decidedly more negative tone than that found in the official AARs."⁸ The author gives several examples and although they discuss tactical level relationships, it is possibly symptomatic of an operational level failing and a total lack of understanding the synchronization of conventional and SOF. This paper will limit the discussion to the category of military operations that are considered MOOTW⁹. Each specific type of operation other than war will not be discussed in detail, but will be limited to discussing those principles of MOOTW and the facets of operational art which are key to the success of MOOTW and are facilitated by the synchronization of conventional forces and SOF. Historical examples will be used to illustrate the successful or unsuccessful application of these principles or facets.

Doctrinal Keys to Success

Before the JFC decides how best to employ operational art, he first must complete a strategic estimate. This estimate is especially significant in MOOTW due to the role that

⁷ "The arrangement of military actions in time, space and purpose..." See Joint Chiefs of Staff, DOD Dictionary (Joint Pub 1-02) (Washington, D.C.: 14 March 1997), 519 for the complete definition.

⁸ Robert C. Shaw, "Integrating Conventional and Special Operations Forces," Military Review, July-August 1997, 37.

⁹ Joint Chiefs of Staff, Doctrine for Joint Operations (Joint Pub 3-0) (Washington, D.C.: 1 February 1995), I-2.

military operations have in conjunction with the economic and diplomatic elements of national power. The JFC while having operational control of all military forces may not control the larger, more comprehensive operation. His estimate must take into account the entire operating environment with a focus on the missions and objectives assigned. He must push to receive the clearest and most coherent direction possible from the National Command Authorities (NCA). This may not always be possible because forces may be deployed before the policy has been fully developed. Once he is given specific guidance, he can begin developing his concept for the employment of military forces to attain strategic and operational objectives. This will translate, "...the joint force commander's strategy into operational design, and ultimately, tactical action, by integrating the key activities at all levels of war."¹⁰ This will allow the JFC to, "...attain the assigned objective(s) in the shortest time possible and with minimum casualties."¹¹ The fundamental elements or facets of operational art are crucial to operational success, and the synchronization of conventional and SOF is necessary to ensure the best possible use of military power. Timing is the overarching element in all facets, especially when synchronizing conventional and SOF.

Synergy is the employment of conventional and SOF to achieve concentration that allows you to attack the physical capabilities, morale and will of the enemy.¹² While some MOOTW have no enemy, concentration is still necessary to attack the root cause of the reason for your employment. The key element of synergy is that "[i]t is difficult to view the contributions of air, land, space, and special operations forces in isolation. Each may be

¹⁰ Joint Pub 3-0, GL-10.

¹¹ Ibid, III-9.

¹² Ibid, III-10.

critical to the success of the joint force, and each has certain unique capabilities that cannot be duplicated by other types of forces.”¹³ In addition to the military synergy, the JFC must consider how to include the other government agencies (OGA), non-governmental organizations (NGO) and private volunteer organizations (PVO) so prevalent in the MOOTW environment. The JFC does not exercise authority and control over these organizations, however, he must attempt to synchronize their activities using SOF core capabilities, to better take advantage of the synergistic effect that would follow. He should take advantage of his SOF assets that have the agility “...to quickly concentrate synergistic effects from widely dispersed locations and assist joint force commanders in achieving decisive results without the need for time-consuming and risky massing of people and equipment.”¹⁴ General Schoomaker refers to this as a “Tailor to task Capability.” Conventional forces on the other hand, would be used as necessary to dominate those aspects of the operational environment which would facilitate SOF operations and their synchronization with OGA, NGO, PVO, and conventional forces.

Simultaneity allows you “...to bring force to bear on the opponent’s entire structure in a near simultaneous manner that is within the decisionmaking cycle of the opponent”¹⁵. In MOOTW, “forces” include all elements of national power. Simultaneity is the use of your capability against the entire enemy capability and strengths to place more demands on enemy forces and functions than can be handled.¹⁶ When applied to a counterinsurgency, you should not allow the enemy a sanctuary, but rather you should conduct your operations across

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Peter J. Schoomaker, 20.

¹⁵ Joint Pub 3-0, III-11.

¹⁶ Ibid.

the entire operating area. This concept applied to MOOTW has been in service doctrine since the Marine Corps developed the "Small Wars Manual." "The Manual urged that military and political action be taken simultaneously."¹⁷ The JFC achieves this by using the core competencies of his forces. The Russians in Afghanistan failed to do this for the first several years of their occupation. "Despite the obvious fact that the 'enemy' of the Soviet invasion forces was an irregular guerrilla force practicing an unconventional style of warfare, the Soviets persisted in using conventional military forces during the first two to three years of its occupation."¹⁸ Initially, the Soviets were unable to bring force to bear on the entire Mujahedin structure with any degree of simultaneity. They conducted large mechanized operations which did not allow them any surprise or depth to their operations. They tried to use the same mechanized formations that were stationed in Europe and these poor tactics led the Soviets to have the wrong forces available. Later in the war they introduced a preponderance of lighter, more mobile airborne and air assault units. When they did learn what type of war in which they were involved, their military performance improved; however, they failed to use their economic and diplomatic "forces" simultaneously to achieve total operational success. The lesson for JFC's is to ensure the right mix of force capabilities is resident in conventional or SOF and use them in a synchronized manner to ensure simultaneity, then reassess their roles as needed. This is especially key when engaged in a MOOTW where the mission requires a careful analysis of the timing and phasing of forces to

¹⁷ David Keithy and Paul Melshen, "Past as Prologue: USMC Small Wars Doctrine," Small Wars and Insurgency, Autumn 1997, 92.99.

¹⁸ Scott R. McMichael, Stumbling Bear: Soviet Military Performance in Afghanistan (London: Brassey's 1991), 14.

decide whether conventional or SOF should be the main component and how best to employ them across all levels of war strategic, operational and tactical.

Centers of Gravity as a facet of operational art is probably the most crucial.

However, it is probably the most difficult concept to grasp when operating in a MOOTW environment. The classic definition of a center of gravity is "...those characteristics, capabilities, or locations from which a military force derives its freedom of action, physical strength, or will to fight."¹⁹ In a conventional war you have a physical enemy to attack, not always in MOOTW.

The center of gravity may be easier to find when operating in a counterinsurgency. Generally, "[i]n an insurgency the strategic centre of gravity will be the support of the mass of the people....The government response to an insurgency should take as its fundamental assumption that the true nature of the threat lies in the insurgents political potential rather than his military power...."²⁰ Even though the British were able to recognize this fact in Malaysia, it still took them 12 years to succeed. The Soviets in Afghanistan and the U.S. in Vietnam never did learn that lesson and suffered major defeats as a result. Other types of MOOTW, however, do not lend themselves to such an obvious choice. What is the center of gravity in a humanitarian assistance operation, especially one that has become a more complex contingency by adding a peace enforcement operation? Is there a center of gravity without a physical enemy to focus on? Can hunger be the enemy? The JFC has to identify what is the target or object against which his actions have to be directed to achieve success.

¹⁹ Joint Pub 3-0, III-20.

²⁰ G Bulloch, "The Application of Military Doctrine to Counter Insurgency Operations—A British Perspective," Small Wars and Insurgencies, Autumn 1996, 169.

Is it lack of food, lawlessness or a poor transportation and distribution system? How does the JFC know he has it right? He must choose measures of effectiveness to monitor those factors he considers crucial to mission success then continually reassess them. The JFC can then choose the appropriate mix of conventional and SOF against the key object or target which ensures success, not just militarily, but as it applies to the strategic goals chosen by the civilian leadership. As always, he must continue to reassess the mission and make adjustments as necessary.

Principles of MOOTW

There are six MOOTW principles: objective, unity of effort, security, restraint, perseverance, and legitimacy.”²¹ The first three are derived from the standard principles of war and the others are more specific to MOOTW. The three specific to MOOTW and unity of effort will be discussed as they relate to synchronization of conventional and SOF.

Unity of effort is derived from the principle of war, unity of command. “It emphasizes the need for ensuring all means are directed to a common purpose.”²² In MOOTW this is especially important and difficult to accomplish. In addition to the normal chain of command for U.S. military forces, MOOTW are usually done with coalition partners and can also include OGA, NGO and PVO. This hodgepodge of parties does not lend itself to the normal military chain of command and will make unity of effort very difficult unless it is recognized and made a priority in planning. The synchronization of conventional and SOF in this process is crucial for success. The ability to recognize and make the best use of their respective core competencies is key to unity of effort. For example, civil affairs (CA) and

²¹ Joint Pub 3-07, II-1.

²² Ibid., II-3.

psychological operations (PSYOPS); two of the principal SOF missions and coalition support; a collateral SOF activity are critical to achieving unity of effort in a MOOTW.

“SOF play an important role in building consensus and establishing effective liaison among the many players in peacetime operations.... [I]anguage ability, cultural awareness, reliable communications, and familiarity with foreign armed forces—built on repeated peacetime deployments—allow SOF coalition support teams to foster unity of effort for the JFC. SOF, especially civil affairs units, can be used to provide the same link with civilian agencies. In addition, interagency information coordination, led primarily by psychological operations specialists, is a crucial determinant of success.”²³

Command and control (C2) is another important element of unity of effort. Every effort must be made to ensure the C2 is appropriate for the operation, which is especially difficult but significant in MOOTW. For example, the C2 arrangement during UNISOM II in Somalia, which lacked synchronization between SOF and coalition conventional forces, was a contributing factor for the casualties suffered by the Rangers on the night of 3 October 1993.²⁴

Restraint in MOOTW means to, “[a]pply appropriate military capability prudently. A single act could cause significant military and political consequences; therefore, judicious use of force is necessary.”²⁵ In MOOTW an action at the tactical level could have strategic implications. During Operation Just Cause, the JFC had a requirement to avoid civilian casualties and infrastructure damage as much as possible while planning “...the most expedient military approach for defeating the Panamanian Defense Force, and capturing General Manuel Noriega.”²⁶ The acknowledged restraint implied in the mission statement

²³ Special Operations Command, Special Operations in Peace and War (USSOCOM Pub 1) (January 25 1996), 4-13.

²⁴ For greater detail see Kenneth Allard, Somalia Operations: Lessons Learned (Washington, D.C.: NDU Press 1995), 55-61.

²⁵ Joint Pub 3-07, II-4.

²⁶ Jennifer W. Taw and John E. Peters, “Operations Other Than War: Implications for the US Army,” Small War and Insurgencies, Winter 1995, 385.

was prompted by the political objectives, which included "...preservation of vital physical infrastructure, the creation of a political atmosphere conducive to stabilizing the country after the invasion, reinstatement of the Endara government, and the creation of a new civilian police force."²⁷ Here the JFC must understand the core capabilities of SOF in relation to the use of conventional forces. Their ability to conduct direct action missions such as short duration strikes against specific targets having operational significance will reduce collateral damage with more certainty than the use of conventional forces. "...[O]ne cannot kill one's way to victory in an insurgency. While the American belief that 'firepower kills' is quite correct, the historical record depicts a more important reality, killing does not bring victory."²⁸ This quote while directed specifically toward insurgencies is applicable to all MOOTW.

Another key component of the restraint principle is how it applies to the rules of engagement (ROE). Strict adherence to published ROE is key to mission success. "ROE in MOOTW are generally more restrictive, detailed, and sensitive to political concerns than in war, consistent always with the right of self-defense."²⁹ The JFC has to be aware of how his conventional and SOF operate in his area and request ROE that support his forces, leverage their individual strengths and allow them to accomplish the mission. While all types of forces operate in the same area, they have varying degrees of contact with the local population. SOF are generally in much closer contact and need to strictly observe the ROE.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Larry Cable, "Getting Found in the Fog: The nature of Interventionary Peace Operations," Small Wars and Insurgencies, Spring 1996, 105.

²⁹ Joint Pub 3-07, II-4.

Perseverance means to “[p]repare for the measured, protracted application of military capability in support of strategic aims. Some MOOTW may require years to achieve the desired results.”³⁰ Conventional forces may be initially necessary in some MOOTW such as peace enforcement operations to set the conditions for the more long term core capabilities found in SOF. “SOF foreign internal defense, unconventional warfare, civil affairs, and psychological operations missions are potentially the lengthiest efforts in peacetime operations. These programs must take a long-term view of the situation and must be consistent with the ultimate solutions sought”³¹ Dr. Larry Cable describes it as the difference between “patience, persistence, and presence versus find, fix, and destroy.”³² The current deployment to Bosnia is a prime example. The initial entry was weighted toward conventional forces and now CA and PSYOPS forces are emphasized for the “protracted application of military capability. The JFC has to comprehend “protracted application” and how he needs to synchronize the core competencies of his conventional and SOF. Since the U.S. does not have a recent history of supporting long term commitments, the need to synchronize forces for mission accomplishment is very important. Also, constant reassessment of what is working or not working is important. Again, the JFC needs to understand the impact that his military operations have on the long term political objective.

Legitimacy is the principle whereby “[c]ommitted forces must sustain the legitimacy of the operation and of the host government, where applicable. In MOOTW, legitimacy is a condition based on the perception by a specific audience of the legality, morality, or rightness

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ USSOCOM Pub 1, 4-14.

³² Larry Cable, 106-7.

of a set of actions.”³³ The audience can be the U.S. public, coalition partners, other nations, participating forces or the people of the nation or area in which operations are being conducted. There are many factors that influence this legitimacy. Bosnia is an example of how timing is important to legitimacy. Overwhelming conventional forces were first used to gain the necessary influence over the warring factions. This allows SOF to operate in an environment more receptive to CA and Psyop. Again, conventional and SOF offer the JFC a wide range of capabilities to enhance the legitimacy of the MOOTW. SOF can conduct a “[w]ell thought-out civil affairs program to build effective infrastructure, and a carefully designed foreign internal defense program to assist the local military in creating a stable environment—both supported by a fully integrated psychological operations campaign—can help a host nation establish, build, and maintain its legitimacy.”³⁴ Legitimacy is a decisive element in MOOTW. Therefore, any successful effort to combat those opposed to the JFC’s goals, must employ political and psychological means to undermine opposition legitimacy. The legitimacy battle must be fought on their own turf.³⁵ It may be necessary to establish the joint force legitimacy with all pertinent parties after military intervention. Operation POWER PACK conducted in the Dominican Republic in 1965 was undertaken without the consent of any of the parties. However, to gain and maintain legitimacy it was necessary to quickly establish a neutral position and transition to a less aggressive stance. The JFC needs to decide when the time is right to transition to a more SOF oriented posture from the

³³ Joint Pub 3-07, II-5

³⁴ USSOCOM Pub 1, 4-15.

³⁵ David Keithy and Paul Melshen, 99.

conventional force operations to maintain legitimacy. This SOF oriented posture will emphasize PSYOPS, CA and Humanitarian Assistance.

Conclusions

The MOOTW environment makes it critical that conventional and SOF are synchronized in order to ensure mission accomplishment. Those principles of MOOTW and facets of operational art discussed as being especially relevant to the JFC when planning and executing a MOOTW illustrate the need for complementary rather than competing capabilities in joint forces. The importance of timing the entry and use of conventional and SOF was also made apparent. Past MOOTW have demonstrated what can happen when these forces are not synchronized. "What evolved in Vietnam was an eclectic mix of conventional and unconventional warfare, largely devoid of coherent strategy."³⁶ While this example seems outdated, the synchronization of conventional and SOF still remains a problem. The doctrine for "...interventionary operations faces the task of addressing the relationship between special and conventional forces".³⁷ The successful synchronization of forces employed during Operation JUST CAUSE in Panama, demonstrates the effect it will have on mission accomplishment. "The result was a special operation writ large, rather than a series of unconventional and conventional operations stitched together."³⁸ How does the JFC know when he has it right? He may not, but constant reassessing and adopting to the situation is key. The JFC must analyze his forces to ensure they are right for the mission. If

³⁶ Ibid, 103.

³⁷ Larry Cable, 107.

³⁸ Thomas Donnelly and others, 399.

at any time he decides they are wrong, he must ask for the appropriate mix. Furthermore, staffs and commanders must be fully educated on the use and employment of SOF.

“Effective use of SOF requires sufficient coordination between conventional and SOF forces and commanders, adequate understanding (and appreciation) of SOF skills and capabilities by conventional commanders, and joint training and exercises between SOF and conventional forces.”³⁹ How do we ensure that the complete synergistic effect of fully synchronized conventional and SOF forces is applied in future operations? One option is to continue to take the steps currently underway such as exercises, joint training, liaison officers, more complete planning, professional military education and doctrine refinement. Command and control shortcomings have been addressed with the formation of the Special Operations Command and Control Element (SOCCE) which “is the focal point for the synchronization of SOF activities with the land and maritime operations. The SOCCE is normally employed when SOF conducts operations in conjunction with a conventional force.”⁴⁰ While continuing these steps will help synchronization, they are not the entire solution. Another and more drastic option proposed is to have a Joint Special Operations Task Force (JSOTF) “...assume responsibility for operations at the outset by taking operational control of tailored combat units.”⁴¹ This may be applicable for certain small scale MOOTW, but does not address the larger issues of what force is the focus of effort and most importantly, who is best suited for the JFC role.

³⁹ Jennifer W. Taw and John E. Peters, 381.

⁴⁰ Contained in the final draft to the updated Joint Pub 3-05, “Doctrine for Joint Special Operations.”

⁴¹ For a complete discussion of the concepts' strengths and weaknesses, see Ed Phillips, “Army SOF: Right Tool for OOTW,” *Special Warfare*, Summer 1997, 2-13.

Both points of view certainly have merit. However, the solution is within the JFC. He needs to have the experience, education and situational awareness to truly understand the nature of the conflict or mission. He must set aside his service bias or conventional/SOF culture and take a balanced and objective view of the ultimate goal, mission success. The JFC through mission analysis, must determine which force facilitates the other. In most MOOTW it may initially be SOF facilitating conventional forces and then SOF may become the focus of effort. He must understand that the focus of effort is not necessarily with the one that has the preponderance of forces. The JFC by constant awareness of the MOOTW principles and applying the facets of operational art most important to MOOTW will best synchronize his forces. This will ensure that the JFC truly understands what the mission is and tailors the force to achieve the military and political objectives in the shortest time with the fewest casualties.

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